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Revitalization of the Handloom Heritage of Chhota Udepur, Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

The rich and beautiful products of the weavers of India have been rightly called “Exquisite poetry in colourful fabrics.” These beautiful traditional textiles were woven on the simple loom and the technique has been passed on through generations. However, many traditional weavers have either lost or are fast-losing the essence and aesthetics of their indigenous crafts and craftsmanship. The researcher’s concern is for the preservation and revitalization of one such handloom heritage, the tribal cloth of Chhota Udepur, Gujarat, before it vanishes from our sight was high.

Snow ball technique was used to draw a convenience sample. The data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Observation technique was used to know the process and technique of this indigenous weaving craft. Field visits brought to light that the fast track changes in all spheres of human existence have surely altered the craft conditions. The researcher contributed to the revitalization of the Tribal cloth through design and product development. The tribal cloth was given a new look with reference to its yarn count, fabric count, colours and design layout. The new layouts were woven by the weavers themselves on their existing pit loom without making any changes in the existing loom setting. The prepared products as per the layouts were test marketed and its results generated encouragement and sense of pride in the weavers for their craft.

INTRODUCTION

Textile is mankind’s greatest need. Coupled with this need was his urge for decoration, which led to the development of design on the textiles. In course of time, weaving became part and parcel of his mundane life, his culture and tradition. Thus, weaving spread throughout the world; turned from a household craft to a cottage industry.

The origin of Indian woven textiles can be traced back to the Indus valley civilization, where people used homespun cotton for weaving their garments. The rich and beautiful products of the weavers of India have been rightly called “Exquisite poetry in colourful fabrics.” It is said that there was no trick of the weaver’s art and trade that was unknown to them. India was the first country in the whole wide world to have perfected the art-craft of weaving.

Among the many places in India, Gujarat is one of the place where people follow traditional weaving famous from ages for its interesting products of handloom. The variety of textiles of Gujarat have the differences in raw materials, the combination of yarns and colours, in the effective use of traditional techniques, and in designs used by different communities, caste and region of the Gujarat state. Loin cloth of Chhota Udepur is one of the lesser known handwoven textiles from Gujarat.

Chhota Udepur is a district situated on the boundary of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat state. The weavers here weave a loin cloth called the *Langot* or the *Kasota* for the tribal Rathwas residing in Chhota Udepur and those on the border of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

The art of loin cloth weaving has been the local occupation of the tribal *Vankar* community since their ancestral time, which has been carried on to the present generation. The natives still follow the old method of weaving as well as the traditional designs as that of their ancestors. The cloth is made in rib weave with extra weft technique on a pit loom.

In the age of advanced technology and urbanization *Langot* the traditional dress of the tribals has been replaced by other forms of western garments which would have surely resulted in a decrease in its demand and hence, in its manufacture. The fast track changes in all spheres of human existence poses new challenges which needs to be addressed afresh.

METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive in nature combined with exploratory research. The study aimed to understand the present status of loin cloth and its makers from Chhota Udepur, Gujarat. A design intervention through exploration of new product possibilities was planned for the survival of the craft. Multiple field visits were made for rapport building and come closer to their daily life experiences. Case study method along with observation method was used for the collection of data and design intervention.

Collection of Preliminary Information

The researcher collected information on the tribal cloth weaving of Chhota Udepur, Gujarat from the available published and unpublished literature by visiting Department of Clothing and Textiles Library and the Hansa Mehta Library of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Bhasha Kendra (Adivasi Academy) Library at Tejghad, in Chhota Udepur, and other relevant literature on the World Wide Web.

Documentation of the present status of tribal cloth

The natives engaged in the weaving of tribal cloth were interviewed and their transcripts as description and images were recorded. Changes, if any, were studied with reference to a previous study conducted to further contribute to its survival, growth, and development, if possible, within the resources available.

Preliminary survey of craft

Based on the information available in unpublished research conducted in 1990, in Department of Clothing and Textiles, Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara preliminary survey was done through personal visits to listed villages of Chhota Udepur, and also Bhasha Kendra, Tejgad to know about the existence of craft and about the weavers.

Preparation of tool

An interview schedule was framed using both open ended and close ended questions. The interview schedule contained detailed questions such as their socioeconomic status, status of crafts and products, technical aspects about craft such as reed size, yarn type, procurement of yarns, products made by craftsman, marketing of products and problems. The processes, tools,

equipment used were not included since these were covered in the previous study done from the department, and the researcher on preliminary visit did not find any changes in it.

Selection of sample

According to secondary source and preliminary visit it was noted that the weaving was done by artisans belonging only from *Vankar Samaj*. Based on previous study, there were 6 villages and in 6 villages 80 weavers were engaged in this craft in 1989-1990, and today in 2015-2016 researcher found only one weaver each from the village of Vasedi and Dhandoda of Chhota Udepur district, Gujarat practicing this craft. The researcher also met one person who had stopped weaving since last three years because of illness. Thus, only two weavers were selected purposively since they agreed to serve as informants of the craft. Researcher started collecting the data from the field from the month of August 2015.

Collection of data

The data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from the weavers practicing the craft of weaving tribal cloth. Secondary sources included several libraries and Non-Governmental Organization involved with upliftment of the tribal community. Data was collected using interview, observation method and photography. To build a rapport with the weavers and fetch reliable information, the researcher made multiple visits to the weaver's place. Researcher personally interviewed the weavers. Observation was done for technical details.

Analysis of the data

Data collected with regards to weavers and their craft was qualitative in nature and hence was presented in a meaningful manner as text and images, which was self explanatory.

Exploration of new product possibilities

Researcher reinvented the cloth with reference to its yarn count, fabric count, texture and colour. Researcher worked with weavers and helped them to understand the factors of changing the yarns and colours of yarns and how they can make new products on the same loom.

Preliminary tests

Researcher tested the yarns which the weavers were using for making the tribal cloth. The cloth was also tested for its fabric count, wash fastness, and shrinkage using standard tests methods.

Selection of fabric and colours

Based on the Preliminary test results of tribal cloth researcher changed the yarns, especially the weft yarn. To add colour and texture in the cloth researcher took different count of yarns in weft. Colour selection for the yarns was done according to S/S 2016 Pantone colour forecast to make it relevant to the present day. Contrastingly, colours of the products were also kept as traditional. Both these traditional and trend based colours were purposively selected, to create awareness about the traditional tribal cloth and to know the difference between traditional cloth and reinvented cloth.

Preparing the sample

Based on the results researcher changed the count and colour of wefts yarns for the new products. No changes were made in the warp yarns since the weavers were not ready for a

complete change in raw materials. Also, they were hesitant to reset the loom with new set of warp yarns. The researcher tried out a sample to check its appearance and texture with the changed raw material.

Selection of products

There were limitations of making a cloth by the weaver on his loom; fabric width and count, stiffer yarns, drape and thickness of the fabric. Few potential products thus listed were cushion covers, curtains, handbags and folders.

Market survey

The researcher surveyed the local market place in Vadodara and ChhotaUdepur to know if similar or same products as per the list were available in the market, its standard size and at what price.



Figure 1-: Hand bag

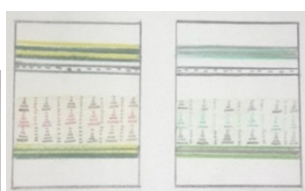


Figure - 2: Folder sketch



Figure -3: Folder sketch

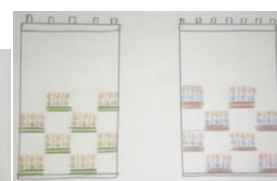


Figure -4: Curtain sketch

Product Design

Five design layouts for four products each were made by the researcher keeping it simple so that emphasis could be laid on motif and the colours. In consultation with guide for each product a layout was selected (figure 1- 4) which was first woven on the existing pit loom of the weaver and then stitched into the respective product.

Working with weavers

The researcher helped the weaver in pre-loom processes and guided them in execution of the designed layout.

Construction of products

Stitching of the products was done by tailors. The products size selected are listed in a tabular format.

Product	Length	Width	Sides	Handle
Hand bag	13"	11"	4"	25"x 2"
Folder	11"	13"	-	-
Cushion cover	12"	12"	-	-
Curtain	84"	44"	-	-

Table 1: Dimensions of the products to be developed

Understanding the market for developed products

An exhibition of the constructed products was kept open for all in the department of Clothing and Textiles. A digital invitation card was created and sent on a social media platform to groups with a request to send it other groups.

RESULTS

The main focus of the present study was to preserve this craft and revitalize it through design intervention, since it was found to be languishing. The tribal cloth could now be woven to create new products instead of it being used only as a loin cloth. The fabric reinvented had the traditional designs and width was retained as that of the traditional tribal cloth.

Preliminary information of the craft community

There were only *two* weavers who were practicing this craft, one practicing from eight years and another is practicing from 40 to 45 years. One was from a village name *Dhandoda* which is located at a distance of 5 km to Chhota Udepur city and other is *Vasedi* which was 10 km away from Chhota Udepur city. The weavers followed their traditional practice of weaving in their homes and cloth made was sold in weekly *Haat* every Saturday to the *Rathwa* tribesmen. Weavers lived with their extended families. The products were made by *Vankar samaj* and worn by Rathwa tribes only. Since there were only two surviving weavers engaged in this craft a case study was done to understand the present status of the tribal cloth weavers and the product itself (Plate 5 to 7).

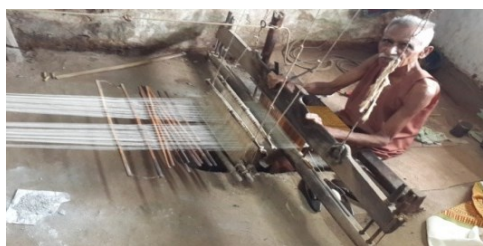


Figure-5a: Surviving Weaver Lalubhai Vankar at his pit loom



Figure-5b: Surviving Weaver Paragjibhai Vankar at his pit loom



Figure-5c: Weaver Purushotambhai Vankar



Figure -6: Indoni craft made by women folk of Chotta-udepur

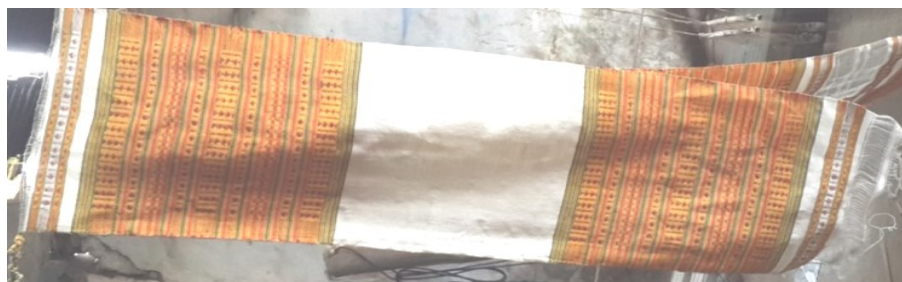


Figure-7: Traditional Tribal cloth made on pit loom

Exploration of the new products

Basic fabric testing of the tribal cloth was done to understand the strengths and limitations of the cloth. The new products possibilities were then explored considering the test results for product improvement and new product development.

Fabric parameter	Results
Fabric count	26/inch warp X 74/inch weft
Yarn count	Warp single yarn 30's Weft single 27's and 28's
Shrinkage	Weft wise 2 inches Warp wise 1 inches
Wash fastness	Very poor

Table 2: Test results of the traditional loin cloth

Traditional cloth and its test results

The traditional cloth was known as *Langot /Kasota*. The langot were worn by male Rathwa tribes to cover their genitals. It was a tradition to wear this cloth during their cultural function and in their religious festival i.e. Holi and Diwali.

The traditional fabric was made in cotton yarns using traditional colours Red, Green, Black and yellow. The cloth was 1.3 meter long and 0.3 meter wide. The cloth was made in rib weave with extra weft technique. The pit loom used had 16" reed and 2 shafts. The designs in extra weft were achieved with the wooden sticks inserted in the warps (Plate 11) behind the warps which served as extra shafts to create the design. These sticks were moved to and fro by the weaver to form a shed for extra weft insertion after each ground pick.

Traditional cloth details, traditional process of fabric making

The weavers never did the loom preparatory process i.e. warping, drawing and denting. The new yarns were attached to the end yarns on the back of the loom and then pulled out through the shafts to be tied on the cloth beam for weaving. The warp they used was single yarn of 30's and it was stiff. The wash fastness of the fabric was poor. They bought unbleached yarns and dyed the yarns at home with direct dyes; without a standard recipe and no additives were used. The weft yarns too were single yarn of count 27's and 28's. As told by the artisans the fabric was made using the same yarns since they learnt it and it has not changed since then.

Selection of products

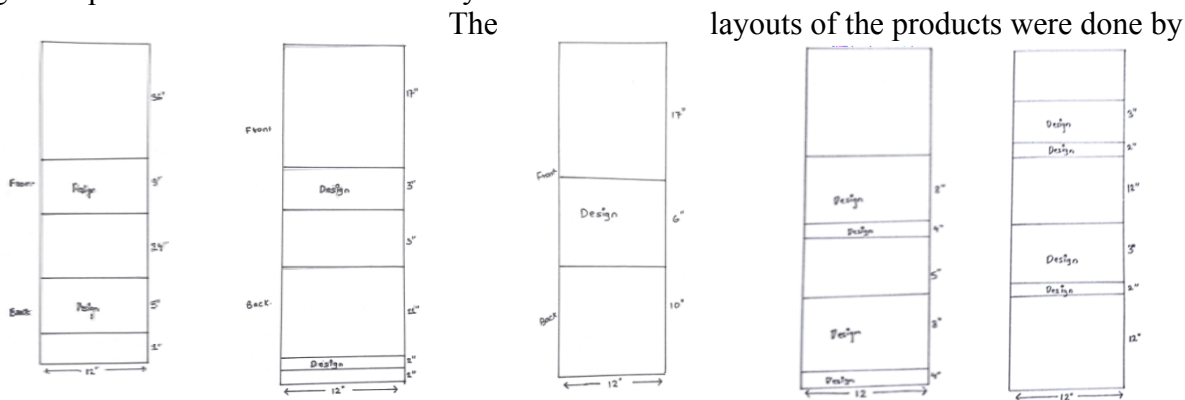
The fabric made on the pit loom by the artisans had a narrow width. The products and its design were selected to work best with the limitation of width. The products selected were: Hand bags, Folders, Cushion covers, and Curtains.

Selection of weft colour and fabric designing

Researcher selected the weft according to the products. The wefts selected were in different count to create the texture. Count of white yarns which were used as ground weave was 2/80's. The Count of the coloured yarns were different i.e. 2/10's, 2/20's, 2/30's, 2/40's, 2/60's, 2/80's (sewing thread was also used as extra weft).

The colours were selected from the Pantone Spring/Summer forecast 2016. Researcher introduced these colours in new products for new market. The colours selected were Green Flash, Peach Eco, Limpet shell, Lilac gray, Snorkel blue, Serenity.

Designs of the products were kept simple so that emphasis could be laid on motif and the colours to give importance to the fabric made by the weavers.



researcher. The layouts were made according to the products which are easy to make for weavers as well as those that are easy to stitch (Plate1).

Designs of the products were kept simple so that emphasis could be laid on motif and the colours to give importance to the fabric were made by the weavers

Folder

Cushion Cover

Curtain

Plate 1: Layout of the products to be woven on the pit loom by the weaver showing the design areas for each product

Making of the products



Figure-10: Hand bags



Figure-11: Folders



Figure-12: Cushion Covers



Figure-13: Curtains

Understanding the market for developed product

To understand the market for developed products researcher arranged the exhibition in department. The visitors were taken through the story of craft and asked to fill up a response from which contained both open and close ended questions.

Responses regarding the created products

Profile of the respondents

There were in total 50 respondents who attended the exhibition. Respondents were from all age groups and included students, teachers, house wives, and fashion entrepreneurs. Majority of respondents were students, i.e. 54 per cent. About 28 per cent were teachers and 18 per cent were others, as shown in Table 2.

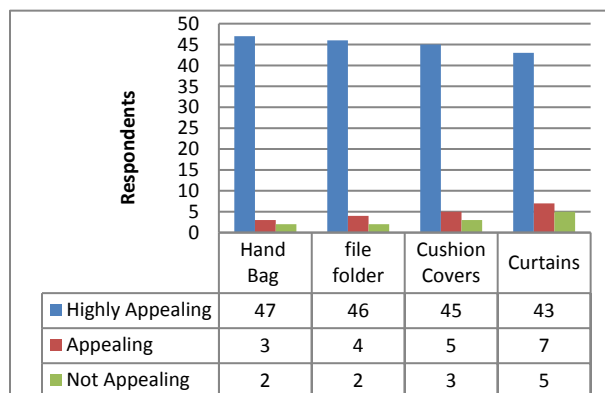
Age	Occupation		
	Teacher	Student	Other
16 -20	-	7	-
21 – 25	3	18	-
26 -30	4	1	2
31 – 35	2	1	3
36 – 40	3	-	-
41 – 45	-	-	2
46 – 50	1	-	2
51 and above	1	-	-
Total	14	27	9

Table 2: Age and occupation of the respondents

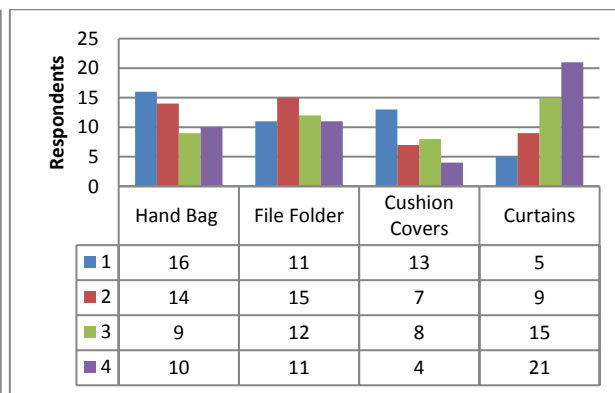
N= 50

Assessment of the developed product

The constructed home furnishing and multifunctional zippered bags in horizontal (File folder) and vertical (Hand Bag) orientation made from the tribal cloth were assessed for their aesthetic appeal, market acceptability and cost effectiveness. The total figures for respondents increased than the total number of responses where respondents were allowed to mark multiple choices and it reduced where the respondents did not respond to certain questions. The evaluation results revealed the following:

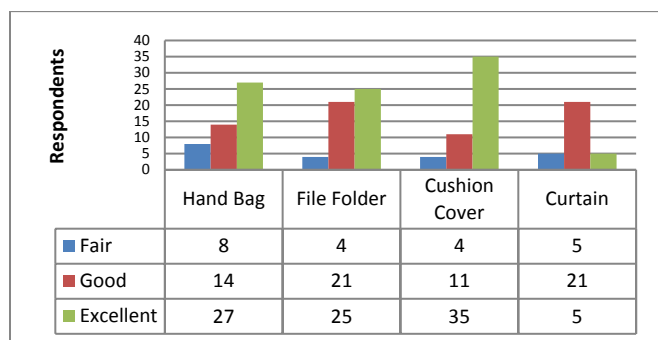


Graph 1: Opinion of respondents towards aesthetic appeal of the displayed products

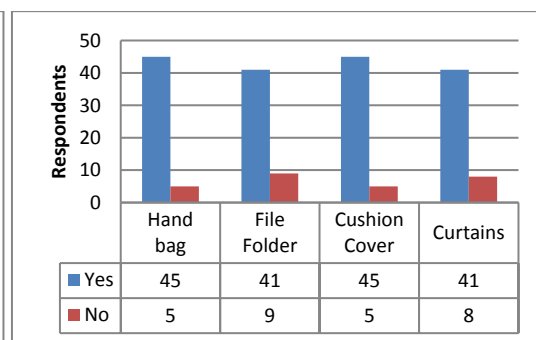


Graph 2: Ranking of the displayed products based on respondents choices

The aesthetics of the designed products were found to be highly appealing by 86 to 94 per cent of respondents, while they were found to be appealing by six to 14 per cent respondents and very few i.e. approximately four to ten per cent respondents did not find it appealing which could be because the product aesthetics did not match the taste of the potential consumer. (Graph1)
As indicated in Graph 2, three of the four products were given a first rank by almost equal number of respondents and curtain remained the last choice of maximum number of respondents. This result showed that people on a personal level liked the hand bag, file folder and cushion cover the most and the curtains the least.
Appearance of the products based on colour combinations (Graph 3) was assessed for the trend based colour combinations. It was noted that smaller items which were predominantly in cool hues were found to possess excellent colour combination, wherein cushion covers gained the maximum responses. However, curtain, too, was considered by at least forty per cent respondents to have good colour combination which had a predominance of warm hue.
Preference to buy the displayed products was found to range between 82 and 90 per cent and only 10 to 18 per cent of them would not do so. The results clearly revealed that these products can be launched in the market place.



Graph 3: Responses towards the colour combination of the created products

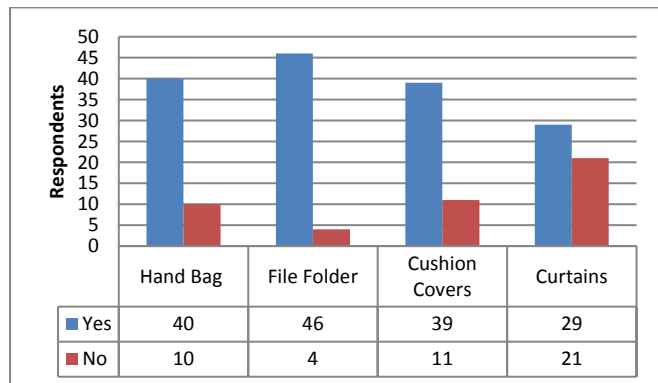


Graph 4: Preference of respondents to purchase displayed products

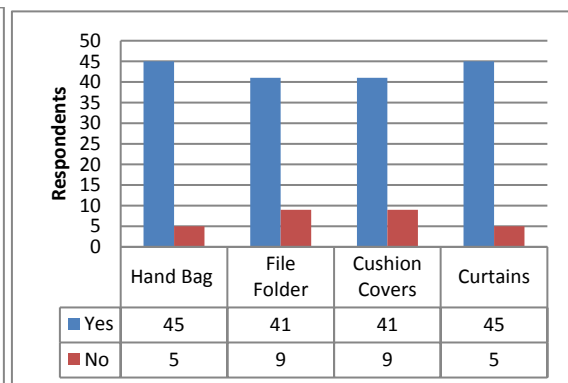
Graph 5 revealed that 80 to 90 percent of respondents were ready to buy the displayed products and 10-20 percent of them were not. It was clear from earlier graph that respondents preferred the handbags over the curtains due to their aesthetic appeal and, hence, more willingness to buy these products. The file folders and cushion covers, though aesthetically appealing, may be preferred lesser than handbags due to the existing market in this field, which would give them a good competition, for the age profile of the respondents may find them to be of lesser utility. This analysis too showed that the product could be launched in the market and would get a good response from the consumers.

It was indicated from Graph 6 that almost 80-90 percent of respondents agreed to buy the given product at the listed price which, included 25% of the profit. It can be seen that people were less willing to buy the curtains due to its less aesthetic appeal or maybe the product did not suit their area of interest. There was a highly positive response to buy small products like hand bags and file folders maybe due to their attractive colours and reasonable prices. The rest 10-20 percent people may have thought that the prices were high but the prices set were according to the labor of the weavers and, hence, was justified. This analysis showed that if the product was launched

in the market people would be satisfied by the price of the products and hence the product would obtain a positive response in the market.

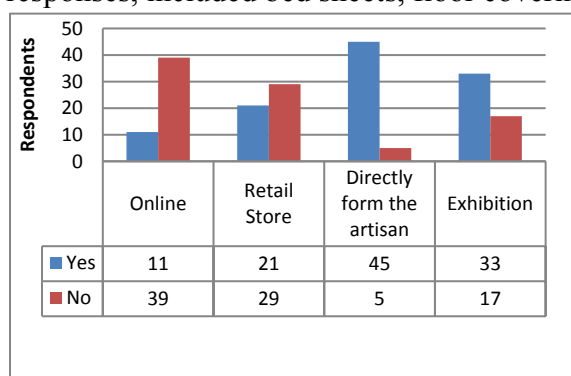


Graph 5: Purchase intentions of the respondents for each product

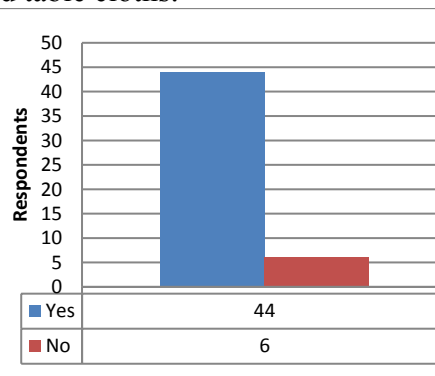


Graph 6: Preferences to purchase the displayed products at the listed price

The preference to buy the products from different platforms as shown in Graph 7 revealed that only 22 per cent people were ready to buy these products online. 42 per cent respondents were ready to buy the product from a retail store and majority of them, i.e. 90 per cent of the respondents were ready to buy the product directly from the artisan. This may be because it eliminates the middle man, thus bringing the price of the products further down which is beneficial to not just the consumer but also the seller. 66 per cent of respondents were ready to buy the products from the exhibition since they felt that the quality and the properties of the product are well explained in the exhibition which also, increased their knowledge about the product they were buying. The responses for products possibilities other than the displayed products (Graph 8) revealed that almost 88 per cent of the people wanted to see more products other than those displayed. It may be that the remaining 12 per cent of the people were satisfied by the displayed product. The other products to be produced, suggested by majority of responses, included bed sheets, floor coverings, and table cloths.



Graph 7: Preferences to purchase the displayed products from several distribution channels



Graph 8: Preferences to know other products required in the same craft

CONCLUSION

This kind of languishing crafts and craftsmen need help in motivating people to do the work as well as well as stimulation of the market to preserve them for the future generations. Hence,

retaining the technique, loom setting, and design, changes made in the fabric layouts, yarn count and colour combinations helped achieve the right mix to preserve not just the essence of the tribal cloth but the tribal craft of weaving too.

Acknowledgement

We are thankful to Bhasha Kendra of Tejgadh Chhota Udepur and weavers for information sharing, which has helped in conducting the research successfully.

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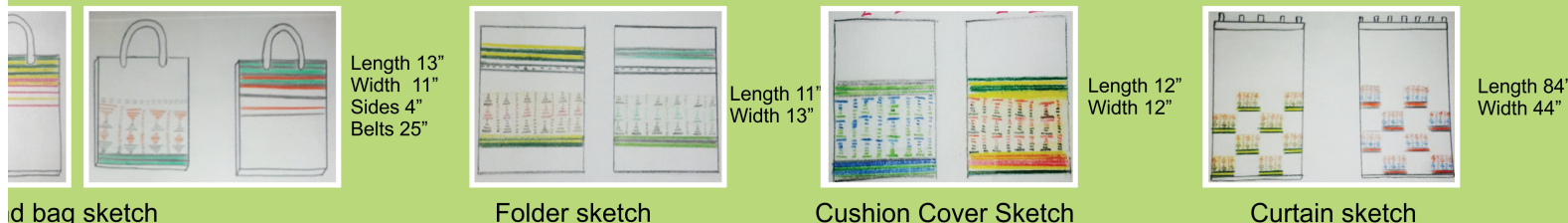
OBJECTIVE

present status of the tribal cloth of Chhota Udepur.
products possibilities in conjunction with existing loom setting and skill of the artisans.
e market for developed products.

METHODOLOGY

descriptive in nature combined with exploratory research.
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liminary survey of craft → Sample selection → Collection of data → Preliminary Test
→ Product Design → Construction of Products → Exhibition



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This cloth is their traditional, th
in their festiva



The fabric sold in weekly Haat c
Chhota Udepur held every Saturd

Selection of weft yarns, Colour Layout and Design:

- The Count of the coloured yarns different that was 2/10's, 2/20's, 2/30's, 2/40's, 2/60's, 2/80's, sewing thread was also used as weft.
- The colours were selected from Pantone Spring/Summer foreca: Researcher introduced these co new products for new market.

Making of Products:



Products: Hand bag, Fol



Exhibition:

